

## RESTRUCTURING CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND USING COGNITIVE AROUSAL TO MOTIVATE L2 LEARNERS

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### ABSTRACT

Second language learners across the globe face difficulty in acquiring L2. One of the factors identified among learners for their poor performance, is their lack of motivation. We all agree that ‘Motivation’ is what moves one to act. It is a goal directed behaviour that presses everyone to achieve the goal. This article tries to identify the significant role of motivation in L2 acquisition along the lines of the theories that govern in achieving motivation. The student in L2 classroom needs to be motivated to acquire the skills of the language. An attempt has been made to identify the lack of motivation among the students and steps have been taken to assist them to adopt to the type of instruction that offers learner training and learner development. During the process, I had moved away from a conventional setting to restructured language setting wherein everyone has a role to play. The conventional setting fails to motivate the language learner, but the restructured environment has scope for students’ intrinsic motivation. The article also has a task devised for innovative methods to motivate students to achieve L2 literacy and critical thinking. Such student-centred tasks motivate students, make them feel involved and engaged and help them to be creative and critical thinkers.

**KEYWORDS:** Integrative Motivation, Intrinsic Motivation, Instrumental Motivation, Restructured Environment

### INTRODUCTION

The learners in a language classroom have individual differences due to their different social and cultural background and their association to the second language. The difference in second language learning is felt in the differences in attitudes and motivational characteristics. According to Harmer (2001) “Motivation is a kind of an internal drive which pushes an individual to do something in order to achieve something.” Quoting Douglas Brown (2000), Harmer points out that a cognitive view of motivation includes factors such as the need for exploration, activity, stimulation, new knowledge and ego enhancement. It is a ‘state of cognitive arousal’ which provokes a ‘decision to act’ as a result of which there is ‘sustained intellectual and physical effort’, so that the person can achieve some previously set goal. “Motivation represents one of the most appealing, yet complex, variables used to explain individual differences in language learning” (MacIntyre et al 2001). A language classroom is a place where different motivational characteristics are exhibited. It is also the right environment to analyse and understand all learners’ attitudes and visions toward achieving their goal.

James Life quotes Schunk(1991) who says “Motivation is the process whereby goal directed behaviour is instigated and sustained.” The goal directed behaviour shows itself through distinct actions of the motivated individual. Some students may be intrinsically motivated whereas others may be extrinsically motivated. Noels et al defines extrinsically motivated behaviour as ‘those actions carried out to achieve some instrumental end’ where as intrinsic motivation is defined as ‘motivation to engage in an activity because it is enjoying and satisfying to do so’. The motivated individual according to Dornyei, as quoted by Cote and Waugh (2004) expends effort, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand, has goals, desires and aspirations, enjoys the activity, experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure, makes attributions concerning success and or failure, is aroused and makes use of strategies to aid in

achieving goals. What factors motivate the learners to the learning of the language is a question to be considered. It may be the global position that English enjoys or the environment of the student which demands him or her mastery of the language. Even if a student has decided to learn English, he or she may come with some ‘attitudes’ which are acquired from the society and developed over the years.

The attitude may be positive or even negative. It is not only the student’s attitude but may also be that of the peers. If they are critical of the subject or the activity, the student’s own motivation may suffer. The attitude of the teacher is also important in instilling a positive classroom atmosphere. Finally comes the teaching method which the student should find to be comfortable and enjoyable.

### **Attitudes and Motivation in L2**

It has been researched and found that attitudes and motivation are influential in second language acquisition because they seek out opportunities to learn the language. It is also demonstrated in studies focussing on classroom behaviour of the students. If the student is motivated he or she would volunteer to answer questions, take part in interactions or initiate interactions. Classroom observations have revealed that there exists a relation between attitudinal/motivational variables and behaviour in the language classroom.

The relation also generally suggests that attitudes are important in determining how active students will be in the language learning process. Students who are highly attentive and enthusiastic have more favourable attitude towards learning English. Rod Ellis(1996) talks about studies which have also indicated that in some learners, motivation resulted from success in learning.

Motivation is also dynamic, shifting all the time as a result of learners’ learning experience and other personal factors. From a pedagogic perspective, the socio-psychological perspective was seen as too deterministic- motivation was treated as something that learners brought to the task of learning L2 that determined their success. Motivation determines the degree of effort the learner puts into L2 learning. But the learners may also come with L2 anxiety, that would work against motivation to learn. Noels (1994) found that learners who are more motivated are less anxious learners and they evaluate their own proficiency more highly and consider the learning task as less difficult.

The recent developments in theories of L2 motivation have brought out two proposals acknowledging the dynamic, multi-dimensional nature of motivation. Dornyei’s (2001) process model of learning motivation for L2 classroom distinguishes a ‘pre-actional stage’ involving ‘choice motivation’, an ‘actional stage’ involving ‘executive motivation’ and a ‘post-actional stage’ involving ‘motivational retrospection’. The second development is the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The extrinsically motivated behaviours are ‘those actions carried out to achieve some instrumental end. Intrinsic motivation is defined as ‘motivation to engage in an activity because it is enjoyable and satisfying to do so’. There is also amotivation that is the absence of any motivation to learn.

### **Background of the Study**

Being a teacher in one of the technical universities in the country, I encounter students with low motivation in L2 class. One reason identified is the kind of rote learning which the students had been exposed to in the schools, that were only examination oriented with little practical application.

The motivational level and the preferences for tasks and activities were limited. A study was conducted among the first year engineering students which threw light on the students’ areas of preference and other aspects of motivation towards their language course and language classes. This study was aimed to investigate

- Whether they were motivated and if so what type of motivation they possessed
- Whether the students could be motivated with cognitive arousal
- whether the students had L2 anxiety and if so how they could be helped to overcome it by providing activities

The responses revealed their main source of frustration and de-motivation that has pushed them to be mere ‘subjects’ in their language class rather than active participants.

## METHODOLOGY

Two groups of students were selected, Group I comprised of 76 students, the majority from the urban areas and Group II comprised of 70 students, the majority from rural background. A questionnaire was administered to the students. There were questions on the i) language course ii) language classes and iii) students' preference. The students are from different social and cultural backgrounds and their educational environment had been very different. The survey questionnaire had 15 items, three based on their second language experience in school, four on their experiences in the University, five on their individual attitudes and finally three open ended questions on their opinion for enhancing L2.

### Pedagogical Preferences in Learning English

Pedagogical preferences refer to the learners' choice of teaching and learning activities carried out in the classroom and this would influence their motivation and the quality of learning in the classroom.

**Table 1**

<b>Q: Which Language Activity Do You Find Interesting and Useful?</b>			
<b>Reading the Passage &amp; Doing Tasks</b>	<b>Listening &amp; Discussions</b>	<b>Oral Presentations</b>	<b>Activity Outside the Text</b>
Group I 0.05%	29%	13.1%	65.8%
Group II 18.5%	75.7%	18.5%	24.2%

For the first group, the activities conducted outside the text using the authentic learning materials have provided the needed interest. The reason why they enjoyed the activities was because they found them very challenging and relevant to their lives. The students in group II found the listening activity followed by oral discussions very effective because they felt that they had been given an opportunity to express their ideas in L2 which many students were indulging for the very first time.

Schmidt (2001) found that a liking for challenging activities in the classroom was the most affected by motivation to learn. Some classroom innovations can promote attitude change particularly among young students. Positive effects were obtained from students in the intermediate level when their goal directed behaviour was instigated and sustained. The implication is that self-imposed instruction has a relatively positive effect. This goal directed behaviour showed itself through distinct actions of the motivated individual.

Section C of the questionnaire consisted of five questions stating the individual preferences of the students. It highlighted the key areas of student motivation theory, self-efficacy, needs and goals, incentives, rise of the self in the traditional classroom and de-motivation. Following are the survey questions presented to the students.

**Table 2**

<b>Q 1: Which Language Skill Do You Feel Important?</b>			
<b>Writing</b>	<b>Listening &amp; Speaking</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Critical Thinking</b>
Group I 0.05%	59.2%	0.06%	43.4%
Group II 0	75.7%	14.2%	24.3%

**Table 3**

<b>Q2: How Do You Find Your English Lessons?</b>			
<b>Very Interesting &amp; Useful</b>	<b>Focussed on Examination</b>	<b>Useful but Not Interesting</b>	<b>Very Boring</b>
Group I 21%	0.10%	56.6%	21%
Group II 59.9%	0.07%	35.7%	8%

**Table 4**

<b>Q3: Do You Like Answering Questions in English Class?</b>			
<b>Does not like</b>	<b>Feel Shy to Answer</b>	<b>Very Interested</b>	<b>Very Anxious</b>
Group I 0.17%	0.10%	22.3%	54%
Group II 0.04%	0.04%	17%	71.4%

**Table 5**

<b>Q4: In What Way Would the Learning of English Help You?</b>			
<b>To Get a Good Job</b>	<b>To Speak With My Friends</b>	<b>To Speak with People of Other Countries</b>	<b>To Get a Good Grade</b>
Group I 43%	19.7%	52.6%	0.07%
Group II 47.1%	0.04%	32.9%	18.5%

**Table 6**

<b>Q5: What is the Goal of Learning English?</b>			
<b>Improving Social Status</b>	<b>Getting Placed in Campus Interview</b>	<b>Getting More Friends</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
Group I 52.6%	50%	14.4%	0.04%
Group II 57.1%	50%	0.04%	0.01%

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

For the first question, the students of group I felt listening, speaking and critical thinking as the major skills to be developed. So naturally the reading and writing sessions of the language classes had been of little interest. But the second group of students, having come from the rural areas felt listening and speaking more important. A problem that the teachers face is that, motivation for L2 learning is deep rooted in the students' minds and in their cultural background. Studies have found (Csizer, 2005) that students pursue a task with great enthusiasm without learning anything because of the instructional inadequacy of the activity. Whatever that the teacher had done would not be powerful enough to motivate students. The general issue is how the students' cultural background fits the background projected by the L2 culture. That is the reason why for the second question 52.9 % of the group II students found the classes useful and interesting whereas only half of this percentage of group I had similar feelings. The utility point of the language had been understood by the students, but along with the thirst for knowledge, the students also enter the classrooms admiring the target culture and language and wanting to get something out of the learning for themselves.

A good percentage, 54 and 71.4 of students showed 'language anxiety' when asked to answer questions in the class or get involved in the task. This shows that students in the class have 'debilitating anxiety' which motivates the learner to flee the learning task. The effects of language anxiety may impair their motivation to learn the language.

The group I students seem to possess integrative motivation for they want to learn the second language, with an openness to identify with the other language community and have favourable attitudes towards the language situation. But classroom students have to embrace the target language on a much deeper level. Gardner and Lambert (1972) wrote; "The acquisition of a new language involves much more than mere acquisition of a new set of verbal habits. The language

student must be willing to adopt appropriate features of behaviour, which characterise members of another linguistic community. The works, grammatical patterns, mode of pronunciation, and the sounds should have to be significant for the learner that goes beyond simple translations or equivalences given by a teacher, grammar book or dictionary

The percentages ranging from 43 to 50 reveal their pragmatic goals of getting a job or a place in higher education. The groups might have differed in their attitudes during the language training but they showed favourable attitudes when it came to gaining social status and getting placed in campus interview. The majority of the students seem to have instrumental motivation. The reality is that the students do not see language acquisition or mastery of language skills as the requirement for a good job, instead a little of the oral skills that will help them to be placed in a job. That may be the reason why they were interested in listening and speaking. There was no ‘cognitive arousal’ to arouse motivation and sustain it in the language task.

### Pedagogical Implications

The responses given by the students had many pedagogical implications. They were not very sure about language learning pedagogy and the goals to be achieved. The lessons were looked upon as materials for preparing for examinations. They had only short term goals of getting placed in a job. Language anxiety expressed by many students was interfering in their risk taking and classroom interaction. They lacked ‘facilitating anxiety’ which motivates the student fight the new language task and it gears the learner emotionally for approach behaviour.

The teacher identified the students’ reservations and preconceptions and felt she could influence them considerably. The choice of teaching materials and the information content of the lessons have to correspond to the motivation of the students. The more self-determined a learner’s motivation is, the greater the achievement. Even the 21% of students in Group I and 8% in Group II who found the classes boring or the students with no motivation to learn have to be spurred into high motivation.

The choice of the task and designing of the tasks according to perceived difficulty, would lead to a higher level of participation in class and group activities and help students towards self-monitoring and self-regulation. Dornyei (2003) expanded on this to “include motivation to engage in activity because that activity is enjoyable and satisfying to do” The activities would help to provide a more relaxed socio-emotional environment for learning. In addition efforts have to be made to raise the confident level and courage of the students especially the students from rural areas to enhance their motivation.

In general, the listening and speaking are preferred and in order to satisfy the aspirations of the two groups of students, listening materials are to be selected that are informative and interesting and also help them acquire the nuances of L2, adopt the word sounds, pronunciation, word orders and other behavioural and cognitive features that are part of another culture. The choice of materials will not only motivate the students intrinsically but also make students independent learners. “It is related to basic human needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness.

Intrinsic motivation activities are those that the learners engage in for their own sake because of their value, interest and challenge”(Cote and Waugh 2004) Being intrinsically motivated to learn improves the quality of learning and will promote effective learning as well as enhance intrinsic motivation and self-esteem. A good percentage of students showing intrinsic motivation reveal that it might have come from the socio-cultural environment rather than from the individual. This goes along with Gardiner’s socio-educational model which proposes that motivation is based on inter-group attitudes and attraction to the target group and culture. Students have felt that what they are learning is relevant in their lives and helping them attain their individual goals and needs. As Rivers (1987) points out, according to them

achievement in second language should be related to such personality attributes as anxiety, status seeking, need for approval, social conformity and --- these personality variables will influence motivational level.

MacIntyre et al (2001) claimed that there should not only be integrative and instrumental motivation but also a list of variables including extrinsic rewards, self-efficacy, expectancy, attributions, locus of control and so on. Providing rewards alone impairs learning. From the pedagogical point of language learning, motivation in L2 is a strategy adopted by Good Language Learners (GLL).The Good language learners

- Adopt or modify learning to suit themselves.
- Involve in the learning process by taking part in classroom interaction.
- Develop language both as system and communication.
- Pay constant attention to expand their knowledge.
- Take into account the demands of L2 learning process.

The students should also use i) cognitive strategies, which involve conscious ways of tackling learning such as resourcing and elaborating ii) meta-cognitive strategies, which involve planning and thinking about learning and monitoring one's own speech and writing and evaluating how well one has done and iii) Social strategies, which means learning by interacting with others.

### **Initiating and Sustaining Motivation**

Gardner and Lambert themselves mentioned the challenges of researching the motivational aspects of second language achievement when they commented on the inherent difficulty in conceptualising and measuring those motivational variables that would likely determine success in second language acquisition. The experience of handling students with different motivational levels enabled me to find that the students must be encouraged to develop independence inside and outside the classroom. The students take on responsibility for their learning based on their goals. The teacher had to provide an environment for individuals to form an attitude to learn the language, a desire to learn and motivational intensity.

The classroom environment has a stronger motivational influence than the other factors. Dornyei(2003) examines the motivational impact of the various aspects of the learning context like the i) Course-specific motivational components (relevance of the teaching materials, interest in the tasks, appropriateness of the teaching methods) ii) teacher-specific motivational components( the motivational impact of the teacher's personality, behaviour and teaching style practice) and iii) group-specific motivational components (various characteristics of the learner group such as cohesiveness, goal-oriented and group norms). Although there are classroom situations and tasks that foster motivation, Paul(1990) feels that there is also evidence to suggest that students' perceptions of the classroom as well as their individual motivational orientations and beliefs about learning are relevant to cognitive engagement and classroom performance. Accordingly some strategies are identified to be followed by the teacher.

- Strategies for developing their basic motivational conditions,that is, to create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere in the classroom
- Generating initial motivation which is to increase the students' expectancy of success in particular tasks and in learning in general.

- For maintaining and protecting motivation which makes learning stimulating and enjoyable for the learners by enlisting them as active task participants.
- For encouraging positive self-evaluation by offering rewards of a motivational nature.

Students' motivation can be consciously increased using creative techniques. Rod Ellis (1996) said that we need to explore the factors involved in motivating students to do tasks over which the teacher has some control. Some of the ways could be to provide a non-threatening learning environment where the student takes learning to himself. Paul (1990) advocates a model with three components for such self-regulated learning. It includes an i) expectancy model, which makes the student think that he could perform the task ii) a value component which includes the task to be very valuable to achieve his goal and iii) an affective component, which includes the student's emotional reactions to the task. The task should be comprehensive, interactive and authentic to motivate the students more. Communicative experimenting should be stimulated, for the learners to be actively involved and also be flexible to suit the learners' differing needs and abilities.

## A CREATIVE TASK TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS

### Objectives of the Task

- To hone listening and speaking skills
- To be active listeners
- To use the cognitive, meta-cognitive and affective strategies.
- To develop 'thinking' skills.

### Pre-Listening

- What information do you expect in the passage ?

Thinking skills activated are *Making plausible inferences, predictions and assumptions*

**During Listening:** The students listen to the passage and simultaneously complete the work sheet.

Thinking skills or cognitive strategies employed are i) *Distinguish relevant from irrelevant facts* ii) *Distinguish facts from opinion* iii) *Think independently* iv) *Compare and contrast the ideas of the speaker* v) *Recognise contradictions* vi) *Analyse the views of the speaker and their own views* vii) *Evaluate the merits and demerits* viii) *Interpret the language of the speaker* ix) *Listen critically*

### Post Listening

- *How many of you agree to the speaker? Why?*
- *How many of you do not agree to the speaker? Why?*
- *What do you infer from the speaker's argument?*
- *Did the argument convince you? How?*
- *Explain the critical vocabulary used which had a wealth of thought.*

### Extended Activity (Group Discussions)

The task being challenging, led to cognitive arousal helping them overcome language anxiety and get involved in the learning process.

## CONCLUSIONS

Caroll believed that “as long as learners remain cooperative and actively engage in learning whether they want or not, motivational differences will not make much difference in achievement.” There is no doubt that students’ motivation can be consciously increased using ‘creative techniques’ .Creative tasks provide more opportunities to practise speaking in English offering more interesting, challenging and exciting fun filled activates that will engage the whole class.

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